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AUTHOR Goodwin, Paul; Newman, Isadore
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships between maternal employment during three periods in the child's life, the child's self-concept, and family orientation. Variables statistically controlled were intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sex, the child's race, and the family's socioeconomic status. It was hypothesized that the period in the child's life in which the mother worked accounted for a significant amount of variance in predicting the child's self-concept and/or family orientation and that there were significant differences in the self-concept and/or family orientation of high school students according to whether their mothers worked or never worked. Data from High School and Beyond, a national longitudinal study of high school sophomores and seniors, was used. An ex post facto design was employed, and regression model comparisons were written to reflect the questions of interest. The F-test was used to test for statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. Effect sizes were calculated for all models and used to determine practical significance. No significant interactions were found, and the hypotheses were found to be insignificant. This indicated that both self-concept and family orientation were not significantly related to maternal employment. Four pages of references and an appendix containing variable lists and data tables are included. (JAZ)

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The Functional Relationship Between Maternal Employment, Self-Concept, and Family Orientation

Paul Goodwin
Portage Path Mental Health Center

Isadore Newman
Office of Educational Research and Evaluation
The University of Akron

This study investigated the relationship between maternal employment during three periods in the child's life and the child's self-concept and family orientation. The High School and Beyond data, which is a national study of 58,270 1980 high school sophomores and seniors, was used. Regression model comparisons were written to reflect the questions of interest. No significant interactions were found and all four general hypotheses were found to be nonsignificant. This indicated that within the limits of this study, both self-concept and family orientation were not significantly related to period of maternal employment.

Presented at A.E.R.A. San Fransisco, California
April 1986

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The Functional Relationship Between
Self-Concept, Family Orientation,
and Maternal Employment

PAUL GOODWIN; ISADORE NEWMAN

Objectives

The problem investigated in this study was to estimate the relationship between maternal employment during three periods in the child's life and the child's self-concept and family orientation. The following variables were statistically controlled: intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sex, the child's race, and the family's SES.

Methods and Data Source

The High School and Beyond (HSB) data, which is a national longitudinal study of 1980 high school sophomores and seniors in the U.S., was used in this study. The total number of students sampled was 58,270, and they were selected so as to maximize representativeness of the sample.

An ex post facto design was employed, and regression model comparisons were written to reflect the questions of interest, while attempting to control for many alternative explanations with the use of analysis of covariance. The F-test was used to test for statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. The Scheffe formula was used to correct for multiple comparisons and the .05 alpha level was chosen. Effect sizes were calculated for all models and used to determine practical significance.

Instruments

Self-Concept Scale

The self-concept scale is a subset of the survey. Rosenberg (1965) developed a measure of what he called self-esteem. A "positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self" (p. 31) is synonymous

with the term "self-concept" used in this study. Rosenberg's (1965) original scale contained ten items and was presented with the following comments.

> . . . We explicitly attempted to select items which openly and directly dealt with the dimension under consideration. Respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following items:
>
> 1) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
> 2) At times I think I am no good at all.
> 3) I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
> 4) I am able to do things as well as most other people.
> 5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
> 6) I certainly feel useless at times.
> 7) I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
> 8) I wish I could have more respect for myself.
> 9) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
> 10) I take a positive attitude toward myself.
>
> "Positive" and "negative" items were presented alternately in order to reduce the effect of respondent set. While the reader may question one or another item, there is little doubt that the items generally deal with a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward oneself. (pp. 17-18)

The HSB researchers selected six of Rosenberg's items to be used in their survey. This selection was made after consulting Rosenberg as to the best six items in the scale and was done in order to save space. The items selected were numbers 10, 7, 4, 1, 2, and 5 from the above list. A composite score based on four items was then created.

1) It take a positive attitude toward myself.
2) I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with other.
3) I am able to do things as well as most other people.
4) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

The composite score was constructed to be comparable to similar data collected in 1972. This was accomplished by transforming each item within grade to a standard score with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The standardized items were summed to give the composite measure. The present researcher,

being primarily interested in the 1980 data, felt that this procedure may not utilize all of the information available in the survey, first because only four of the six items were used (only the positive ones), and secondly, the standardized and summed composite seemed less conceptually clear than Rosenberg's original scale. For these reasons, a composite of all six items was constructed to compensate for these deficiencies. This was accomplished by first recording the two negative items to make them consistent with four positive ones. It as important to include these items because it increased the number of items in the scale and because the negative items were included for a specific purpose (to reduce the effect of respondent set) in the original scale.

A Principal-Component Factor Analysis of these six items, with ones in the diagonal and an Eigen value of 1 as a cutoff produced a one factor solution. Tables 2 and 3 are reports of the results of this preliminary analysis. That these items measure one factor is not surprising, since the original scale was designed to do this. These results were presented here to justify the use of the six-item composite in this study. The final step in the construction of the composite score was to sum these items, without changing them into standard scores. The resulting self-concept composite correlated .8670 with the HSB composite, and is considered by this researcher to be better because it contains more information and its interpretation is conceptually clearer. It is clearer because of greater similarity to the component items than the standardized composite.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 About Here

Family Orientation

Increasing maternal employment represents a major change in the structure of the American family. Frequently it is this structural change that is said to mediate any potential effects of maternal employment on children. This researcher felt, therefore, that it was important to examine the potential relationship between maternal employment and the child's perception of the importance of role of the family and family life. Therefore, a second dependent variable, family orientation, was examined in addition to self-concept. The HSB researchers had constructed several composite variables such as orientation to work, orientation to family, and orientation to community. Part of the family orientation variable was used in this study. The family orientation composite consisted of three items, each transformed into a standard score with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The standardized items were then summed. The three items used were:

How important is each of the following in your life?

1) Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life (V295).

2) Living close to parents and relative (V301).

3) Getting away from this area of the country (V302).

The first item, which asks the respondent how important a happy family life is to him or her, appeared to this researcher to be the item most closely related to the family question of importance to this study. The other two, which essentially tap a desire for geographical closeness or distance from the family, are less clear. It could be argued that a respondent might indicate a desire for distance from the family because of negative affect surrounding the family (a negative view of family life). Just the opposite could also be

argued: a person feels strong enough to leave the family and life some distance away because of a positive attitude toward family life (Perkins, personal communication, April 1984).

For these reasons, a variety of statistical and logical procedures were undertaken to help the researcher to determine the best dependent variable. First, a second composite was computed by recoding the negative item (V302) to make the coding consistent with the two positive items and then summing the three items without standardization. Recall that the HSB researchers standardized items comprising the composite scores to insure comparability to the 1972 data. Since such comparisons were not of interest in this study and it was felt that the unstandardized composite was conceptually clearer, such a composite was computed. Second, the correlations between each item, and each item and the two composite scores were calculated. These correlations are reported in Table 4. Third, regression equations were constructed using two of the variables to predict the third; this was done for each variable. The results indicated that, while each pair of variables were related, there was more unique variance than common variance when two items in combinations was used to predict a third item. To further clarify and substantiate this finding, a Factor Analysis of the items was conducted (see Tables 5 and 6). This analysis demonstrated a 1 factor solution indicating

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Insert Tables 3, 4, and 5 About Here

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the three items were measuring the same underlying construct. The items together accounted for 41% of the variance in this construct. By investigating the commonality of the solution, it became abundantly clear that the

construct was accounting for only 38% of the variability in item 1 (V295). This meant that 62% of the variability in item 1 was not accounted for by this construct.

Since item 1 was logically related to this study and 62% of the variability in this item was not being measured by this common construct, it was felt that item 1 should be used as the criterion measure for family orientation instead of the HSB composite score (of the unstandardized composite score). There would have been an advantage in using the composite score if more the variability was accounted for by the common construct.

Research Questions

The two-way interations between maternal employment and each covariate were tested in order to test the underlying assumption of analysis of covariance that there is no significant interaction between the covariate and the treatment variables, and to determine the relative importance of the covariates.

There were four general hypotheses tested to determine the relationship between the periods of maternal employment and the child's self-concept and family orientation "over and above" the covariates.

Specific research hypotheses were written, to be tested contingent upon finding significant in the general hypotheses, for the purpose of identifying which groups were different.

Following are the four general hypotheses that were tested:

1. For mothers who worked, the period in the child's life in which she worked accounted for a significant amount of variance in predicting the child's self-concept measured in high school, over and above intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sec, the child's race, and the family's SES.

2. There is a significant difference in the self-concept of high school students according to whether maternal employment took place during any of the identified periods in the child's life or whether the mothers never worked, over and above intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sec, the child's race, and the family's SES.

3. For mothers who worked, the period in the child's life in which she worked accounts for a significant amount of variance in predicting the child's family orientation measured in high school, over and above intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sec, the child's race, and the family's SES.

4. There is a significant difference in the family orientation of high school students according to whether maternal employment took place during any of the identified period in the child's life or whether the mothers never worked, over and above intactness of the family, father's employment status, the child's sec, the child's race, and the family's SES.

Statistical Treatment

Maternal employment is a variable which cannot be manipulated experimentally and, as indicated earlier, lends itself to an ex post facto design. This was demonstrated by the predominance of ex post facto research of a descriptive native (t, F, Regression) found in the literature. While some path analysis was done, it was decided by these researchers that path analysis was not appropriate for this study for the following reasons: first, path analysis assumed relationship based on theoretical considerations. Maternal employment is a relatively new phenomenon and there is relatively little theory in this area. Exiting theoretical perspectives (e.g. Erickson) which have been brought to bear on the topic have not been supported by empirical evidence (Smith, 1981). Secondly, path analysis assumes causal relationship

which is inappropriate in ex post facto research (Newman, 1977). Third, path analysis assumes that all variables relevant to the relationship being investigated are present. In the HSB data, quality of non-maternal care was not measured. Finally, path analysis assumes no multicolinearity--that variables are not correlated. In this present study, several independent variables were correlated. Based on these considerations (I. Newman, personal communication, May 1984), it was decided that path analysis was not an appropriate procedure.

An alternative procedure, which was employed here, was to write regression models that reflected the question of interest, while attempt to control for many alternative explanations through the use of analysis of covariance (Newman, 1979). This approach has advantages over much of the previous work done on maternal employment. It combines the advantages of a large representative sample (particularly in the area of maternal employment before elementary school) with the ability to statistically control for many potential intervening variables which were not controlled in many previous studies. Furthermore, regression is a flexible approach that allows models to be written which reflect the specific research hypotheses and permits analysis of categorical as well as continuous variables (Newman, 1979).

The F-test was used in this investigation to test for statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. The Scheffe formula was used to determine the F value needed for significance in order to correct for multiple comparisons.

The .05 alpha level was chosen for this study. However, because of the large sample size involved in this data base, statistical significance may not be appropriate in interpreting the practical significance of the results. Bobner and Newman (1982) state:

> There are a variety of advantages to using large data bases for doing research in identifying trends, relationships, etc. The statistical power tends to be phenomenally high. Virtually any difference, even extremely small ones, become highly significant. It is not unusual to be able to get an R^2 = .001 that can be significant at the alpha .0001 level, if the N is very large. That is, it is possible that a relationship can account for less than 1/10% of the variance and still be highly significant, even though 99.9% of the variance remains unexplained. (p. 111)

Friedman (1968) similarly states:

> For a given difference between groups it is necessary to take sample size into consideration since lower chance probabilities are found with a large sample than with a small sample. A common attitude is that significant results obtained with large samples are more compelling than equally significant findings obtained with considerably smaller sample, even though a small sample can detect only a rather large effect. In contrast, any variable having a finite effect, no matter how trivial, will produce statistically significant differences with very large samples (c.f. Bakan, 1966, p. 425). (p. 245)

Bobner and Newman (1982) "suggest that it may be more appropriate to utilize the concept of effect size rather than alpha when interpreting the results of statistical analysis on large data bases" (p. 111). The concept of effect size can be thought of as the difference between two means in standard deviation units or in terms of proportion of variance accounted for (Newman & Benz, 1979, p. 171). Consequently, effect sizes (f^2) were calculated for all models. Small effect size (.02) (Cohen, 1977, p.) was chosen based on previous maternal employment research (Rockwell, 1983, p. 99). A significant relationship having an effect size of .02 or greater was judged to be of practical significance. If the effect size was less than .02, the relationship was not considered to have practical significance even though statistical significance was obtained. In other words, the effect size must be at least as small as Cohen's small effect size (.02).

Although the null hypothesis can never be accepted, the size of the data base allows one to assess the degree of confidence that the null actually is true (Bobner & Newman, 1982, p. 113). Therefore, for all non-significant

relationships, confidence intervals were constructed to determine the certainty that the null was true within the limits set by the effect size selected.

Power Analysis and Confidence Intervals

Confidence intervals were calculated based on a sample size of 17,319. This was the smallest N among the four hypotheses and, therefore, is the most conservative estimate. These confidence intervals were calculated according to procedures detailed by Newman & Benz (1979) and Bobner & Newman (1982). Since N = 17,319, one is able to identify a difference of approximately 2/1,000 of a standard deviation unit. Therefore, if significance is not found (as was the case in the present study) one could be 95% confident that an effect size of .002 or larger does not exist in the population.

Another way of conceptualizing this is that if a relationship does exist, that relationship would account for less than 2/10 of one percent of the variance and that 99.8% of the variables in the criterion is unrelated to the predictor variables. From a practical point of view, one can "accept the null hypothesis" within these confidence intervals. That is, while the null can never actually be accepted, the groups can be considered "equivalent" for practical purposes (Bobner & Newman, 1982, p. 114).

Results and Conclusions

No significant interactions were found and all four general hypotheses were found to be nonsignificant. This indicated that within the limits of this study, both self-concept and family orientation are not significantly related to period of maternal employment.

Summary of Results

Following is a brief summary of the questions that the hypotheses were written to answer:

H_{G1} and the corresponding specific research hypotheses answered the questions: "For mothers who worked, are there differences in her child's self-concept related to which period in the child's life she worked?" And if there are, "Which periods are different?"

H_{G2} and the corresponding research hypotheses answered the questions: "Are there differences in children's self-concepts that are related to whether or not his or her mother worked?" And if there are, "Are these differences further related to the period in which she worked, compared to children whose mother's never worked?"

H_{G3} and the corresponding specific research hypotheses answered the questions: "For mothers who worked, are there differences in her child's family orientation related to which period in the child's life she worked? And if there are, "Which period are different?"

H_{G4} and the corresponding research hypotheses answered the questions: "Are there differences in children's family orientation that are related to whether or not his or her mother worked?" And if there are, "Are these differences further related to the period in which she worked, compared to children whose mother's never worked?"

Discussion and Scientific Importance

The purpose of this study was to estimate the relationship between maternal employment and two other variables: self-concept and family orientation. Self-concept was chosen because it is believed that it is a pervasive response pattern that has an effect on virtually every other aspect of a person's behavior. Family orientation was chosen because it had been charged that increasing maternal employment would lessen the importance of the family in the socialization process. It was found that there was no significant relationship between maternal employment and these two variables in the HSB sample.

Previous research yielded inconsistent results, and predictably provided few answers to the question of the impact of maternal employment on children. Rallings and Nye (1979), summarized their review by saying that "despite persistent concern over the effects of maternal employment on the child, we can find little evidence of appreciable effects, positive or negative . . ." (p. 217).

Smith (1981) said that maternal employment research was biased by the "motherhood mandate" (Russo, 1979) and that "for the vast majority of infant and preschool children . . . we simply do not know what the effects of maternal employment are" (pp. 196-197).

In between these two extremes, many researchers found either no effect or a slightly positive effect for children of employed mothers on a variety of variables. Also, some studies found differences dependent upon variables such as sex and social class, but there was little consistency in these findings. An important factor was the selection of the samples in many studies. Another factor was the way in which maternal employment and other variables were defined. Finally, there was little agreement as to which variables should be controlled. All of this contributed to the inconsistent picture that emerged from the literature over the past decade.

The findings of this present study (that maternal employment, per se, is relatively unrelated to children's self-concept and family orientation) makes an important contribution to this issue. These results clearly lend support to the growing body of evidence that suggests that maternal employment does not have much impact, beneficially or adversely, on children across a variety of variables. The results of the present study indicated that regardless of the period in which mother worked, or whether she never worked at all, maternal employment was not significantly related to the child's self-concept

or family orientation. The force of this finding is strengthened by the large sample size and control of potential intervening variables employed in this study.

These results are important to parents because "other things being equal," they indicate that maternal employment is relatively unrelated to their children's self-concept of family orientation as measured in this study. This finding can help to relive guilt, provided that guilt is coming from a belief that maternal employment is going to result in children who value themselves and the family less because their mother worked. These results will not have much effect on that guilt if it is coming from the mother's difficulty dealing with role conflict and not living up to society's mandate of the "good mother." This involves those "other things being equal," factors such as non-maternal child care arrangements and the family's attitude toward maternal employment, which were not addressed in this study. Knowledge of the findings of this study may result in parents paying more attention to these factors if they are planning to combine dual-career marriage with raising a family. They may ask, for example, if maternal employment per se, is not going to affect the child's self-concept or family orientation, what other variables enter into the decision. What are the costs/benefits of various child care arrangements? What are our career goals and how will maternal employment affect them?

These results are important to researchers because of the size and representativeness of this sample. It is sufficient, at this point, to emphasize that these results are consistent with a number of major reviews that found little evidence of either beneficial or adverse effects of maternal employment.

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APPENDIX A
VARIABLE LIST

Variable List

Variable	Description	Coding
X_1	Self-concept Composite	Composite Score
X_2	Family Orientation-Importance of happy home	1 - Not Important 2 - Important 3 - Very Important
X_3	BEO - Mother worked before elementary school only	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_4	BEE - Mother worked before and during elementary school	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_5	BEEH - Mother worked before elementary, during elementary, and during high school	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_6	EO - Mother worked during elementary only	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_7	HSO - Mother worked high school only	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_8	EHS - Mother worked during elementary and high school	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_9	BEH - Mother worked before elementary and during high school	1 - worked 0 - otherwise
X_{10}	NO WORK - Mother never worked	1 - never worked 0 - otherwise
X_{11}	Family intact	1 - intact 0 - otherwise
X_{12}	Family not intact	1 - not intact 0 - otherwise

Variable	Description	Coding
X_{13}	Father never employed	1 - never employed
		0 - otherwise
X_{14}	Father employed	1 - employed
		0 - otherwise
X_{15}	Males	1 - male
		0 - otherwise
X_{16}	Females	1 - female
		0 - otherwise
X_{17}	Whites	1 - white
		0 - otherwise
X_{18}	Blacks	1 - black
		0 - otherwise
X_{19}	High SES	1 - high SES
		0 - otherwise
X_{20}	Medium SES	1 - medium SES
		0 - otherwise
X_{21}	Low SES	1 - low SES
		0 - otherwise

Descriptive Statistics for All Computed

Variables with NOWORK Included (H_{G2} and H_{G4})

Variable Name	Coding	Frequency Distribution	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total
BEO	0	26411	.03	.171	27228
	1	817			
BEE	0	26100	.041	.199	27228
	1	1128			
BEEH	0	18768	.311	.463	27228
	1	8640			
EO	0	26532	.026	.158	27228
	1	696			
HSO	0	22464	.175	.380	27228
	1	4764			
EHS	0	21912	.195	.396	27228
BEH	0	26419	.030	.170	27228
	1	809			
NOWORK	0	21990	.192	.394	27228
	1	5238			
INTACT	0	6999	.743	.437	27228
	1	20229			
NEVERWO	0	27187	.002	.039	27228
	1	41			
MALES	0	14200	.478	.312	27228
	1	13028			
WHITE	0	2971	.891	.312	27228
	1	24257			
HIGHSES	0	20595	.244	.429	27228
	1	6633			
MEDSES	0	13356	.509	.5	27228
	1	13872			
LOWSES	0	20505	.247	.431	27228
	1	6723			

Variable Name	Coding	Frequency Distribution	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total
FAMORENT	3	179	7.101	1.235	27228
	4	555			
	5	2264			
	6	4551			
	7	7731			
	8	8735			
	9	2719			
	Missing	494			
SLFCNCEPT	6	732	11.301	2.578	22728
	7	976			
	8	1644			
	9	1955			
	10	2434			
	11	2801			
	12	3972			
	13	3571			
	14	1646			
	15	809			
	16	432			
	17	248			
	18	134			
	19	68			
	20	34			
	21	19			
	22	20			
	23	7			
	24	7			
	Missing	5719			

Table 1

Factor Analysis of the Self-Concept

Scale Initial Solution

Factor	Eigen Value	% of Variance	Cum. Percent
1	2.53229	42.2	42.2
2	.99650	16.6	58.8
3	.77593	12.9	71.7
4	.67778	11.3	83.0
5	.54751	9.1	92.2
6	.46998	7.8	100.0

Table 2

Factor Analysis of the Self-Concept Scale:

Item Description and Factor Matrix

HSB Variable	Item Description	Factor 1 Loading
V306	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	.73922
V308	I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	.72599
V309	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	.69116
V313	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	.66131
V315	At times I think I am no good at all.	.50469
V317	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	.53762

Table 3

Intercorrelations Between Family

Orientation Materials

	Happy Family Life	Living Close	Getting Away	HSB Composite	Unstandardized Composite
Happy Family Life	--	.1324 (55671) P = .000	.0836 (55789) P = .000	.6348 (56262) P = .000	.5397 (55349) P = .000
Living Close	.1324 (55671) P = .000	--	.1269 (55494) P = .000	.6548 (55843) P = .000	.6734 (55349) P = .000
Getting Away	.0836 (55789) P = .000	.1269 (55494) P = .000	--	.6314 (55950) P = .000	.6938 (55349) P = .000
HSB Composite	.6348 (56262) P = .000	.6548 (55843) P = .000	.6314 (55950) P = .000	--	.9901 (55349) P = .000
Unstandardized Composite	.5397 (55349) P = .000	.6734 (55349) P = .000	.6938 (55349) P = .000	.9901 (55349) P = .000	--

Table 4

Factor Analysis of the Family Orientation

Variables: Initial Solution

Factor	Eigen Value	% of Variance	Cum. Percent
1	1.23107	41.0	41.0
2	.92573	30.5	71.6
3	.85320	28.4	100.0

Table 5

Factor Analysis of the Family Orientation Variables:

Item Description and Factor Matrix

HSB Variable Name	Item Description	Factor 1 Loading
V295	Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life.	.38468
V301	Living close to parents and relatives	.69137
V302	Getting away from this area of the country.	.60696